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U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Natural Resources
Washington, DC 20515

Opening Statement of
The Honorable John Fleming
Tuesday, April 8, 2014 at 2:00 p.m.
1324 Longworth House Office Building

Subcommittee on Fisheries, Wildlife, Oceans and Insular Affairs Legislative Hearing on
“Various Measures to Amend the Coastal Barrier Resources Act”

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Good afternoon. Today, the Subcommittee will examine a number of bills that make technical corrections of the Coastal Barrier Resources System.

The Coastal Barrier Resources System or CBRS was established based on the fundamental premise that there are certain coastal lands, along the Atlantic Ocean, the Great Lakes, and the Gulf of Mexico, that were so ecologically fragile that the federal government should not subsidize their development.

Since President Ronald Reagan signed the Coastal Barrier Resources Act of 1982, Congress has incorporated within CBRS more than 3.1 million acres of undeveloped land and associated aquatic habitat. There is nothing in this law that prevents Americans from fully developing their private property. However, inclusion within the system does mean that landowners cannot obtain federal flood insurance and that a host of federal subsidies for beach re-nourishment, disaster relief, roads or wastewater treatment plants are not available to the affected communities. In short, property owners can develop but the taxpayer's won't pay.

During the past twenty years, the Congress has enacted legislation to modify certain units of the system. While the overriding reason for these changes was to correct honest mistakes made on hand drawn maps, there have been cases where private property has been treated as a conservation area or state park and where certain communities had a full complement of infrastructure including electricity, roads, sewer and water prior to its designation.

In fact, since 1992, the Congress has modified 43 of the 857 units or 6 percent of the total system. As a result, about 3,000 acres of fastland was removed, while 17,222 acres of fastland and aquatic habitat were added to the system.

In 2006, the Congress enacted the Coastal Barrier Resources Reauthorization Act. An essential provision of that law was the requirement to complete a digital mapping project for a number of coastal barrier units. It is now eight years later and we are still waiting for the Fish and Wildlife Service to submit these final digital maps, which were due nearly six years ago according to the law.

During the last Congress, we heard testimony on two bills to correct units in Florida and Rhode Island. The Committee successfully reported these bills and despite the fact that there was a consensus that honest mistakes were made, these modifications were not enacted into law.

These two bills are before us again today. In addition, we will hear testimony on legislation that proposes to fix additional units in Florida, North Carolina and South Carolina.

I look forward to hearing the justification for these modifications. I also look forward to hearing from the Fish and Wildlife Service as to when we can expect the final digital maps and how much money they have budgeted to produce the required maps. If these are honest mistakes, we should correct them.